



Chrysalis 25

chrysalis: the first twenty five years







## ONCE UPON A TIME

Once upon a time there was a record company so indie, so small, that it had to market its wares on another indie label. Its main act wasn't exactly well known either. An oddball outfit, folksy at roots but with blues/rock leanings, it had already recorded for another record company who knew so little about them that they completely misspelt the band's name on it's only record release.

Flashback and slow fade to the mid '60s, when former University social secretaries, Chris Wright, 22, and Terry Ellis, all of 23, linked talents to form the Ellis Wright Agency, working out of a two room flat in Shepherds Bush, Ellis sharing the flat with an accountant, while Wright slept in the hallway. Eventually, after establishing themselves among the brightest in Britain's band bookers, they moved upmarket gaining a prestigious address in London's West End, though the office was so tiny that there was hardly room to swing a contract around.

The Agency, which, in a mutation of Wright's first name and Ellis' last, eventually became Chrysalis, also moved into management, their main hopes resting upon blues rockers Ten Years After and a Blackpool soul band, The John Evan Smash

AKA The Bag Of Blues. The former were quickly signed to Decca who, unimpressed, only pressed 1,000 copies of the TYA's debut album, all of which were ordered by the label's Manchester branch, causing the release to be a rarity in the rest of Britain for several weeks. As for The Bag Of Blues, they became Jethro Tull and did their dotted line thing for MGM, who were equally unimpressed, the label of the band's first single, "Sunshine Day", crediting Jethro Toe!

Feeling that, under the circumstances, a do-it-yourself approach might prove more rewarding, Wright and Ellis began thinking in terms of their own label. But first they did a licensing deal with Island, a company which, in 1968, was itself a fledgling up and comer, a proviso stating that, should Wright and Ellis' acts log an agreed number of hits, then Chrysalis would be awarded a label in its own right. It took just a few months to turn this piece of apparent wishful thinking into a rock solid reality.

By then Tull had long since developed into something far more than a blues band. Leader Ian Anderson was an onstage nutter par excellent, a kind of wild-eyed Long John Silver, ragged and of one-legged stance, his flute style being based on that of jazzman Roland Kirk. Via such chart albums as "This Was" and "Stand Up", along with a memorable single in "Living In The Past", the band rapidly made the transition from cult heroes into pop idols. The emergence of Island and



Chrysalis as flourishing rock record companies (Island had earlier owed much of its existence to its ska/reggae catalogue) prompted the majors of the day to create their own "progressive" labels.

And so Phillips formed Vertigo, Pye launched Dawn, Decca chipped in with Nova, and RCA fashioned Neon in order to compete. All but Vertigo were to eventually fade, as Island and Chrysalis pursued their own idiosyncratic paths.

Time came, however, for the two front runners to head their separate ways. Chrysalis, having swooped for Ten Years After, when the band's deal with Decca expired, moved in on Procol Harum plus Tull offshoot Blodwyn Pig. With expansion figuring high in the game plan, they began thinking in terms of world domination.



The company gave Bowie an advance in order to acquire publishing rights to his songs, signed gravel voiced Scot Frankie Miller, regarded still as one of the great British soul singers, and Robin Trower and then added Steeleye Span to the growing roster, Steeleye being the first label signing not managed by Ellis and Wright. Steeleye, bless their hand-on-ear vocals, were hardly the kind of outfit to get record company accountants cheering. A group so rural they'd taken their name from that of a Lincolnshire waggoner, they'd notched nothing in the way of hit singles while their three pre-Chrysalis albums

had hardly made it past the village horse-trough in terms of sales. With Chrysalis, however, they were to log two Top 20 singles and a quartet of Top 40 albums during the early '70s.

Additionally, there were others equally adept at filling the label's coffers. Tull had taken off in the USA, gaining massive hit singles with "Living In The Past" and "Bungle In The Jungle", albums such as "Thick As A Brick" and "A Passion Play" reaching Number 1. And in Britain, Adam Faith had wandered into Chrysalis' now impressive off-Oxford Street premises to bend ears to the sound of his protege, singer-songwriter Leo Sayer. Ears being what they were at Chrysalis, Sayer was signed with some alacrity and immediately began paying off his advance, in December, 1973, with "The Show Must Go On".

Adopting the guise of clown, the former street-busker emerged to present a kind of pop-happy Pagliacchi. The record was fine, everyone opined, though Sayer seemed a cert bet to become a one-hit wonder. Thirteen years and 16 hits (most of them Top 20) later, it became apparent that first impressions had not necessarily been correct.

In the interim, the butterfly had been fluttering its wings impressively on the other side of the Atlantic. Ex-Procol Harum guitarist Robin Trower had become a major album seller in the States, his LPs "Bridge Of Sighs", "For Earth Below"





Indy Market's  
**BAD**





and "Robin Trower Live" all claiming a spot in the US Top 40 between 1974-76, while Tull's albums were rarely out of the upper echelons of that esteemed listing, slotting in alongside such other Chrysalis-ware as Procol Harum's "Grand Hotel" and, later, UFO's "Lights Out". UFO, led by Phil Mogg and Pete Way, featured spasmodic appearances by German guitarist Michael Schenker, the ex-Scorpion, and were cited as a major influence on the "new wave of British heavy metal". Ten years on, the label could glance through its scrapbook with considerable pride.

Sure there had been downers, Woodstock heroes Ten Years After, led by guitarist Alvin Lee, whose records had appeared on Deram and Columbia in the States, had broken up. And an attempt by Chrysalis to launch London's Rainbow Theatre as a major rock venue had ended in failure. Also, Gentle Giant, a band of some vision, whose members would ultimately help to shape rock in the '90s (Derek Shulman signing Bon Jovi to Mercury, his brother Ray forming One Little Indian Records, home of The Shamen, The Sugarcubes, etc) had failed to turn their cult status into convincing record sales and seemed destined to continue in losing vein. Even so, champagne corks could be justifiably popped with pride.



## PUNK

In the meantime, Punk had poked its safety-pinned proboscis into the music-biz on both sides of the Atlantic. While some majors reeled in horror, Chrysalis merely shrugged its shoulders and lashed out half a million to sign Blondie, a New York band that had mutated from female garage outfit The Stilettoes. "Wouldn't you like to rip her to shreds?" posed the caption accompanying Debbie Harry's picture in ads that prefaced Blondie's first UK tour. No answer was needed. Blondie had it all. Headed by a singer who was visually stunning and possessed the kind of background reporters pray for - a one-time junkie and hostess- the band also had songs that boasted an appeal far beyond the usual array of rant anthems beloved by most punks and new-wavers. Tallying the Blondie hit singles is a pointless, space consuming exercise. Suffice to state that "Heart of Glass", "Sunday Girl", "Atomic", "Call Me" and "The Tide Is High" all topped the UK charts as did the albums "Parallel Lines" and "Eat To The Beat".



## AND NEW WAVE

And New Wave and Chrysalis remained the best of friends as The Babys, headed by John Waite, took off in America while Generation X, featuring the peroxide-topped sneer that is Billy Idol, began accumulating a steady flow of UK home runs, the tally being enhanced by the chart activities of Stiff Little

Fingers. Erstwhile Generation X mentor and producer Ian Hunter, formerly leader of Mott the Hoople, was signed to the label as a solo artist, recording the classic "You're Never Alone With A Schizophrenic" album with members of the E Street Band before hitting the road with his much lamented friend and collaborator Mick Ronson. Other new wave signings included the eccentric Split Enz, featuring the brothers Finn, later to metamorphose into Crowded House.

By now, the Chrysalis roster was the place for any act of ambition to reside. Ultravox, formerly with Island, shifted allegiance and were rewarded with 16 hit singles, including the atmospheric, heart-wrenching "Vienna", never a chart-topper but a classic nevertheless.

## 2 T O N E

Even more important in the scheme of things proved to be a liaison with Jerry Dammers and the creation of the 2-Tone label. Then Chrysalis A&R man Roy Eldridge (now the label's MD) still recalls the excitement he felt after witnessing an early gig by The Specials. Several other record companies were equally impressed and the mother of all bidding wars seemed likely to break out. But money alone wasn't what Dammers required. He wanted his own label. Wright and Ellis stalled for a while. After all, Chrysalis was their creation, they were proud of the label and didn't feel the need to diversify

into offshoots. However, after much prompting by Eldridge, they agreed to house The Specials on 2-Tone, the label he had created for the band's first indie release. Dammers required more. He insisted on the right to sign at least six other bands to 2-Tone and asked Chrysalis to bankroll the recording sessions to the tune of a thousand pounds per release. A mere fleabite in terms of record company monetary pay-outs, the additional cash was quickly okayed and the Chrysalis 2-Tone liaison moved on not only to provide a total chart take-over by means of The Specials, The Selector, Madness, The Bodysnatchers and The Beat, but also to create a whole new culture, a ska-related movement represented by a black and white skanking mod figure with hands in pockets. It was the beginning of yet another whole new trend, the artist-related label within a now major record company. And what Chrysalis had done for the street generation it was also to do for those who thought in less gritty terms - the New Romantics.



## NEW ROMANTICS

Whether Spandau Ballet were really part of the movement is open to questions. In truth they were post-punk soul boys, immaculately coiffured caperers who thought in terms of dance and disco rather than rock. But New Romantics proved a term on which to hang their hats while waiting for the hits to arrive. Awarded their own label, Reformation, by a company that had learnt much from the launch of 2-Tone, Tony







Hadley and the brothers Kemp didn't have to wait unduly. Signed to Chrysalis in October, 1980, they had a UK Top 5 hit by mid November in "To Cut A Long Story Short".

After which, they didn't put a crochet or quaver wrong, winners like "The Freeze", "Musclebound", "Chant Number 1 (I Don't Need This Pressure On)" and "Instinction" leading to even bigger hits in "True" and "Gold". But in 1986, in the wake of 15 moneyspinning singles, Spandau declared, unbelievably, that they "had not enjoyed the support to which a band of our proven stature is entitled". So off they went elsewhere only, history recalling that '86 was the last year to provide them with a Top 30 record. Before long it was all over, the Kemps eventually turning thespian to become The Krays, a decidedly unromantic move. Amid all this activity, Chrysalis' A&R department was still making friends and influencing record-buyers, signing Pat Benatar, a singer of some diversity, who, among other achievements, provided 15 US Top 40 singles during the '80s.

Keyboardist/Producer Paul Hardcastle also proved an enviable addition to the catalogue, his electro-hit "19" establishing itself as a minor classic, a kind of aural cut-up, involving Vietnam war speeches, that had him tagged in one paper as "Leytonstone's answer to Francis Ford Coppola". An exaggeration? Of course. Nevertheless, within six months of release, the record winged its way high in the charts of 13 different countries, selling three and a half million copies worldwide.



There were others - Linx, Fun Boy Three, Midge Ure, Alvin Stardust, David Grant, Icehouse, The Colourfield, Go West, Living In A Box, Jellybean, Huey Lewis & The News, The Housemartins and Billy Bragg - who helped the label virtually set up house on the Top of the Pops set during the '80s. And Britain's premiere pop show acknowledged the point by requesting Paul Hardcastle to provide a new theme tune, "The Wizard". If some avered that the Beeb had gone Chrysalis-happy, then the comment was understandable. Even then, this was just the tip of the Butterfly's wing. The now solo Billy Idol re-located to America where his hard living lifestyle threatened his health but not his chart success, which included a US Number 1 with his version of "Mony Mony", and the Proclaimers, a twosome who immediately had Auchtermuchty vying fame-wise with Rabbie Burns and Jim Taggart, emerged with their platinum album "Sunshine on Leith".

## T H E B I R T H O F C O O L T E M P O

The mid-'80s also saw the birth of Cooltempo, Chrysalis' dance division. In the past the company had enjoyed its fill of hits for those who like to hot-hoof it. But it had never completely thought in terms of dance, its image being steeped in rock of a multi-dimensional kind. Neither had Chrysalis ever considered its future in terms of chart singles. Though the label had enjoyed more than its fill, singles were often considered as happy accidents, mere promos for the true stock in trade -





albums that sold over the long term. Cooltempo, a more singles-oriented offshoot, presented an opportunity to expand, to diversify. And though nobody admitted as much, at the back of some minds ran the thought that if Cooltempo failed, the image of Chrysalis, forever a league-leader, would remain unsullied.

Not that anyone need have crossed their fingers, Cooltempo soon exploded into being one of the most innovative and successful of all dance labels, initially probing its way by means of licensed deals with American production companies then moving on to showcase the best of UK talent, providing UK Top 40 hits by the BB&Q Band, Doug E Fresh, Real Roxanne and (turn your head and cough) Milli Vanilli. During 1988 and 1989 alone, Cooltempo notched no less than 14 major UK hits. The terpsichorian, raptured brat had grown into a fully-grown strutter of enormous confidence and potential.

## E N S I G N

However, even this didn't encompass the whole of Chrysalis' growth during the decade. For the mid-80s saw the company taking onboard the Ensign label, which, though brandishing an impressive history and a still flourishing catalogue, had been ailing financially. "We were in danger of going under," Ensign MDs Nigel Grainge and Chris Hill later explained: "We were having problems just paying salaries. So we sold the

label which offered two albums to come by The Waterboys, Sinead O'Connor and the newly-signed World Party, while there was a connection with a group from Cambridge called The Great Divide, headed by Boo Hewerdine. Boo eventually put The Bible together and signed directly to Chrysalis because we couldn't afford to sign the band at that moment". Again a relationship paid off in record time. The debut Ensign/Chrysalis single release, Phil Fearon's "I Can Prove It" became a Top 10 hit, whilst the label's more established act, The Waterboys, led by the enigmatic Mike Scott confirmed their reputation with classic albums such as "This Is The Sea" which eventually yielded the Top 3 hit "The Whole Of The Moon".

Then followed the debut album from former Waterboy Karl Wallinger's World Party which went Top 40 in the States during 1987, as did the single "Ship Of Fools".

There had been an earlier Ensign-Chrysalis connection. For Ensign had, during the '70s, attempted to sign Clover, an American outfit who were then based in Britain. The band worked with Elvis Costello on his "My Aim Is True" album but failed to make a breakthrough and returned home in 1978. It was there that lead singer Hugh Anthony Cregg III (also known as Huey Lewis) formed a band called The News and signed to Chrysalis, a single from the debut album, "Do You Believe In Love", reaching the US Top 10. But he was to edge







even higher with "Power Of Love" in "Back To The Future", a movie in which Lewis appeared as a school teacher who turns down a Michael J Fox led-band playing a Lewis arrangement! Since then, Huey hasn't done at all badly and during 1992 Chrysalis were able to release a "Best Of" that contained no less than 3 US chart-toppers by Lewis, along with 8 other Top 20 entries! Lewis also introduced the label to ex-Ace vocalist Paul Carrack who enjoyed US solo success before adding to his impressive track record with Mike And The Mechanics.

So much for the '60s, '70s and '80s. All decades that Chrysalis can look back on with pride. But the label has never been about glancing over the shoulder. Even talk about today is regarded with suspicion. Current hits eventually end up in someone's dumpsters.

## F O C U S   O N   T O M O R R O W

At Chrysalis, the talk has always been focused on tomorrow. And tomorrow looks good. For the '90s, so far, have delivered much and promise even more. Sinéad O'Connor's "I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got" album headed the US charts for 6 weeks in a row in 1990, spawning a monster hit single in "Nothing Compares 2 U". Not that she completed reading the book on How To Win Friends and Influence People. Protests involving the sexism of comedian Andrew Dice Clay ("I think he's a wanker"), censorship in music, and the misuse of patrio-



tism, helped fill millions of column inches in the world's Press, Sinead hitting the jackpot publicitywise when she refused to perform at a New Jersey show if the US National Anthem was played at the gig - an action that saw her records being banned by some Stateside radio stations. Was she right or was she right? The readers of Rolling Stone couldn't figure out the answer. In March '91, after pulling out of both the Grammy and BRITS awards, she was named not only Artist of the Year but also the Best and Worst Female Singer!

Certainly the controversy hasn't harmed the career of the so-called Angel of Angst. Her 1992 "Am I Not Your Girl?" album of covers has been universally acclaimed - "Sinead could sing 'Chirpy, Chirpy, Cheep, Cheep' and make it hurt" proclaimed NME - she's appeared in a Channel 4 TV special and more recently recorded the closing theme for the recent Daniel Day Lewis/Emma Thompson film "In The Name of the Father". Her future? NME nailed it with the comment: "When Sinead has made all her mistakes and sung out all her emotional baggage, then she will start to do the real work with her extraordinary power and enjoy a global stage."

The '90s also saw Las Vegas hard-rockers Slaughter weighing in with three US Top 30 singles and an album, "Stick It To Ya" that not only soared into the Top 20 but was still in the charts 66 weeks after initial entry. Confirmation that their popularity has not waned in the interim came when Slaughter's '92



album, "The Wild Life", went Top 10 Stateside and logged another impressive stay in the best-selling listings.

In Britain, Kenny Thomas has proven that his first hit "Outstanding" could be applied as this and several more of his dance-floor destructors illustrated that white Islington soul could compete with anything heading out of New York or Minneapolis in terms of chart entries. He continues to build his career by stages, having shrugged off the "club artist" tag following a main venue tour in the company of Monie Love and others. Not that the rise of Shara Nelson, hailed as Britain's Queen of Moody Soul, has been as immediate as some elements of the media would have you believe. Once with Adrian Sherwood's free-ranging dub unit Tackhead, she became part of Nellee Hooper's Wild Bunch, linking with other members of the band to form Massive Attack, when Hooper left to work with Soul II Soul. Two years and one critically-acclaimed album with Massive Attack, provided Shara with an enviable CV.

A solo career was the inevitable step. Almost as inevitable was the success of the debut single "Down That Road". However, few could predict that, in the wake of just one album, "What Silence Knows", and a further donation to the singles chart, she would be nominated as Britain's Best New Artist and Best Female Singer at the annual BRITS shindig. But sometimes things work out just as they should.





If Monie Love, Innocence and ex-Working Week soul diva Juliet Roberts have added to Cooltempo's tally of high-selling footwarmers, then Georgia's Arrested Development have edged even further during their four years of existence. Unlike many rap-attack protagonists whose image of ultimate revolution comes gun-packed and muthafugged, AD have happily hip-hopped, holy-hollered and harmonized their way into hearts, supporting the causes of Amnesty International and Greenpeace not only to marvellous musical effect but also winning four million record-buying friends when "3 Years, 5 Months And 2 Days In The Life Of..." album upped to make its initial handshake.

So what else has happened since the current decade has chimed in? Well, maybe Chesney Hawkes found it hard to convince folk that he's not just a one and a half hit wonder, but that original chart single was a monster, hogging the top spot in the UK ratings for five weeks in a row. World Party have continued to grow with every release. A Q Award winner in 1990 for the Party's "Goodbye Jumbo" album, Karl Wallinger only just missed out in 1993, when the gold LP "Bang!" made it to the final short-list of five.

Environmentally-inspired projects have seemingly figured favourably on Chrysalis sales wall-charts. Scotland's folk rockers, Runrig, won a British Environment and Media Award for 1993's "Amazing Things" adding another award to their previ-





ous gold selling catalogue. The group also broke records by attracting 50,000 people to their Loch Lomond show. And while the label has increasingly looked ever-forward, past signings have also played a part in keeping that butterfly logo in mind.

The Proclaimers, who recently completed their long-awaited third album, reminded America of former Pict-pop glories when their "I'm Gonna Be (500 miles)" re-emerged as the opening theme to the Johnny Depp movie "Benny and Joon" and promptly hoisted itself into the US Top 10, helping the parent Proclaimers album "Sunshine on Leith" extend sales to a healthy one and a half million worldwide. The brotherly Ramones too, headed out of the shadows to deliver "Acid Eaters", a more off-beat cover job that included a friendly nudge from Pete Townshend, while Go West, after a three year absence from chart activities, became flavour of the decade once more with a string of major hit singles that included "King of Wishful Thinking", "Faithful", "What You Won't Do For Love" and "Tracks Of My Tears" before Peter Cox opted for a solo career. But he bowed out in style, the duo's final "Aces and Kings - The Best Of Go West" compilation finding favour in some 200,000 record collections as he and Richard Drummie completed a sell-out UK tour.

Meanwhile, as Kingmaker continue on a power-pop path that has brought them such accolades as "they are one of the great



bands of 1991-'92, '92-'93 and so on" Carter USM - second only to REM as NME's Band of the Year '92 - have filled a library of scrapbooks with favourable reviews and royalty cheque stubs, "Post Historic Monsters", their most recent album, being hailed (again by NME) as "the duo's most soul-baring LP yet".

And now its 1994. A year that's to be spiced by new and inventive hip-hop jazz fusion releases from Gang Starr and Guru. A year in which the Tyrrel Corporation's second album will see them shrug off that "Redcar local heroes" tag to become national favourites. Then too, there's an array of glittering goodies brought to Chrysalis through a recent deal with Ruben Rodriguez's highly-acclaimed US Pendulum label, a link that provides releases from Tene Williams; Lisa Lisa; jazz-motivated hip-hop heroes Dignable Planets; hardcore rappers Lords of the Underground; hitmaking soul singer Chris Walker; a former bassist with Ornette Coleman and rapper Papa Chuk. These, plus the talents of Orange, The Joy, former Blancmange singer Neil Arthur and Mutha's Day Out, all recent Chrysalis signings, indicate that there's little danger of the label's future release schedule hitting a dull patch.

Nowadays, Chrysalis is no longer an indie, though through its mainstream label and an array of various offshoots that now includes Compulsion (home of The Joy) it continues to pursue the indie muse, allowing bands to grow, to pursue their own

individual paths, the company's immediate reins remaining firmly in the hands of those who prefer music to all-consuming accountancy. And, while, 25 years on, a moment or two can be devoted to a self-congratulatory pat on the shoulder for all that has been achieved, there's so much more to hear, so much more to watch for. At the denouement of that memorable Kevin Costner movie "Field of Dreams" the camera pans upwards to reveal a never ending stream of visitors heading towards Costner's dreamground and the thought dawns that, despite all that has gone before, the real story is just about to unfurl. Currently, the camera that is Chrysalis is panning in that same direction.

F R E D   D E L L A R



titles available in this series:

<b>u.f.o.</b>	strangers in the night
<b>steeleye span</b>	all around my hat
<b>pat benatar</b>	wide awake in dreamland
<b>blondie</b>	parallel lines
<b>generation x</b>	generation x
<b>go west</b>	go west
<b>billy idol</b>	rebel yell
<b>jethro tull</b>	aqualung
<b>huey lewis &amp; the news</b>	sports
<b>frankie miller</b>	high life
<b>sinead o'connor</b>	i do not want what i have not got
<b>the proclaimers</b>	sunshine on leith
<b>runrig</b>	the cutter and the clan
<b>leo sayer</b>	endless flight
<b>spandau ballet</b>	true
<b>the specials</b>	the specials
<b>ten years after</b>	ssh
<b>kenny thomas</b>	voices
<b>robin trower</b>	bridge of sighs
<b>ultravox</b>	vienna
<b>the waterboys</b>	this is the sea
<b>world party</b>	goodbye jumbo
<b>arrested development</b>	3 years, 5 months and 2 days in the life of...
<b>ian hunter</b>	you're never alone with a schizophrenic
<b>carter usm</b>	1992 the love album



01

02

03 top left ian anderson of jethro tull photographed by jim castello  
bottom left alan lee of ten years after photographed unknown

04 top right too sheer photographed by t. russell

bottom right frankie miller photographed by c. china

05 deborah harré photographed by brian aris

06 bottom left u.f.o. photographed by p. cranin

top right steelye span photographed by t. russell

07 robin tower photographed by colin fuller

08 generation x photographed by brian aris

09

10 the specials photographed by paul cox

11 top left ultravox photographed by brian aris

bottom right ian hunter photographed by dave ellis

12 spendau ballet photographed by eric watson

13 top left pat benatar photographed by mothe bakshi

bottom left billy idol photographed by albert sanchez

14

15 the proclaimers photographed by nick knight

16 arrested development photographed by kristine lanser

17

18 top right mike scott of the waterboys photographed by stefano giovaretti

bottom right huey Lewis photographed by aaron rapoport

19 sined o'connor photographed by kate gamer

20 bottom left kati wallinger of world party photographed by lennax agun

top right kenny thomas photographed by kristel kurmer

21

22 top right the tynd corporation photographed by chris clunn

bottom right guru of gang Starr photographed by humphrey studio

2304 go west photographed by timothy white

25 top left ruggis photographed by andy earl

2506 carter usm photographed by kavin westenberg

27 top left shara nelson photographed by phil knott

bottom left kingmaker photographed by chris howell

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29

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